

Introduction:

Good Morning! I love Christmas!

Jesus's birthday // time with family // filled with joy

Reality

Baby Jesus is in the corner

Crammed family time is unfulfilling

Exhaustion after high expectations leaves us feeling not refreshed and then bills start to roll in

- National institute of mental illness:: 64% of people apparently report being affected by the post holiday Blues
- We know happiness is not from stuff.
- No matter how many things you buy you won't feel satisfied.
- But that doesn't stop us from trying! We think we can outspend our sadness and situations.
- But our dopamine bucket has a hole in it! We can try to fill our bucket but..
- This is why, no matter how much we spend, we will always run out of money, and we won't have enough. We struggle accumulate wealth but still feel broke.
- And when we try and try to change our circumstances, when things don't change, we lose hope. No hope => darkness and depression.
- World says to 1) Change circumstances or 2) be content
- Circumstances are too fragile to carry the weight of our hope, so we suspect Contentment is the real key

ME:

- I watched all the TED Talks on contentment I could find and took notes.
- I used AI to find the common themes from my notes.
- Here is what I learned from those. The world says contentment is from:
- 1) acknowledging our circumstances (what is, just is)
- 2) acknowledge and focus on the good circumstances and ignore the bad
- 3) be happy and appreciate, (and be thankful for) our circumstances.
- 4) don't look for more than you have. (social media for example)

That way the expectation and reality will line up.

WE:

- Some definitely good advice in there, however, when pressed, it leads to some disconnect:
- The issue is:
- 1) ignoring the bad feels dishonest and disingenuous. (Head in the sand)
- 2) the bad is still bad. Ignoring it doesn't make it go away. We still have to face it.
- 3) There is no purpose in the bad things. Life is just about trying to get away from the bad things.
- 4) if you long for more then you will be disappointed when you don't get it. Therefore, it becomes problematic to even desire more good things.
- 5) This is self driven mindset. Impossible if you're not strong enough.(will)

We feel broke because we want more and it's never enough to fulfill our deepest desires

GOD:

- A Christian worldview has a different angle on contentment.

We need to stop pouring our hope into things that won't hold it and instead place our hope in the One who can hold it.

Let's compare.

Paul talks about contentment in a letter called the letter to the Philippians.

Paul at this time was writing from prison. Arrested because he was talking about Jesus. After a long series of events and accusations, he was arrested. He was in prison for many years, then ended up on house arrest. His life was not going very easily.

But he spent the time writing some letters, and we actually have a copy of one of those letters that dates the writing to 50-60 AD

Listen to this excerpt, and listen to his joy! Listen for his contentment – despite his circumstances:es:

Philippians 4:4-13

4 Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! 5 Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.

6 Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. 7 Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

8 And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. 9 Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.

10 How I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me, but you didn't have the chance to help me. 11 Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be **content** with whatever I have. 12 I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. 13 For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. 7

- This is a big contrast to the TED talks I watched. And don't get me wrong, there are actually a lot of overlapping good takeaways in those talks. But like I mentioned, when pressed, it comes up empty.
- Paul's says in contrast:
- 1) **God is our power, not self will**
- "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me". & "God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure".
- 2) **We don't ignore pain, we trust God in it**
- "do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God".
- & "peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, [which] will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus".

- 3) The bad things have purpose.
- "has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake".
- difficult circumstances are used to advance the gospel
- "Do all things without grumbling or disputing", which is only possible if they trust the ultimate purpose of the hardship.
- 4) **We are designed to long for more, but for eternal goals.**
- While the world warns that longing for more leads to disappointment, Paul transforms that longing into a spiritual pursuit that provides "surpassing worth".
- He says we need to aim at a different target.
- (new verse) earlier...
- He disregards all earthly gain ("loss" and "rubbish") in order to "press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus". 3:8-11

I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. 8 Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ 9 and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ.[c] For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith. 10 I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, 11 so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!

- *This spiritual striving ("straining forward to what lies ahead") is necessary for **maturity and joy**.*
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YOU:

- **Maturity and joy** is the goal, not avoidance of difficulties. This reality fits our actual experiences.
- Once you realize that we are not just trying to run away from bad circumstances all the time, and that in fact like Paul said: in every circumstance (good and bad) you can be content and filled with Joy.
- That is why we have hope!
- Story Time: There was a time when the people of Judah were plunged into fear and gloom at the threat of the Assyrian Empire. They were in political and spiritual despair as their King, King Ahaz, was not faithful and just buckling under the pressure. (730 years before Christ). Ahaz would eventually surrender and bargain to be a vassal state under Assyria.

And in this time of despair, The prophet Isaiah wrote Isaiah 9:

“The people who walk in darkness

will see a great light.

For those who live in a land of deep darkness,[c]

a light will shine. ...

For a child is born to us,

a son is given to us.

The government will rest on his shoulders.

And he will be called:

Wonderful Counselor,[d] Mighty God,

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

7 His government and its peace

will never end.

He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David
for all eternity.

- This was a prophecy about Jesus Christ over 700 years before his birth.
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Gospel Call:

The message of Christmas isn't "try harder to be content."

It's that God saw our emptiness and came toward us.

The prophet Isaiah said, "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light." Not the people who fixed themselves, but people in darkness. Our darkness is this: we feel 'broke' trying to hide from our circumstances so we can be happy.

We feel 'broke.' But the Bible tells us the situation is actually much more serious than that.

Spiritually, we aren't just broke; we are in massive debt.

We have all **tried to buy happiness apart from God**, we have all run up a tab of sin and selfishness that we cannot pay off, no matter how 'good' we try to be in the New Year.

But here is the Gospel—the stunning news. God didn't look at our debt and say, "Figure it out."

He sent His Son to pay it.

That baby in the manger grew up. He didn't just give good advice; He came to be our contentment. **He lived the perfect life we couldn't live and died on the cross to pay the penalty for every time we tried to fill our emptiness with everything but God. He rose from the dead, proving He is the solid rock who can hold the full weight of your hope.**

So, you feel broke? In Christ, your debt can be paid. You can be forgiven. Through faith in Jesus, you are held by the King of the universe. That is a hope that will never, ever collapse. To do that, you simply need to put your trust in Jesus – with your whole life. Your heart, mind body and soul.

For those of us who already belong to Jesus, here's the challenge:

- Where in your life are you still hoping circumstances will save you?
- Where have you drifted back into:
 - “If I could just fix this... I'd have peace.”
 - “If this person would change... I'd be okay.”
 - “If this season would end... then I'd feel hope.”
 - “If I had just a little more money... then I'd feel secure.”
- Believers aren't immune to the “leaky bucket” syndrome—we just have Christian language to cover it up.

So here's the call:

- Name the place your hope is leaking... and consciously place that hope back into Christ.
Pray: *'God, this circumstance feels too heavy. I am transferring the weight of my hope from this situation onto you. I trust you with this. Thank you that you are my strength, my provider, and my peace.'*
 - Shift your focus and mind from fear and worry, to things that Paul says are “excellent and worth of praise”
 - Then focus on doing those things in whatever good or difficult situation you are in.

You are actively practicing what Paul did: you are acknowledging the reality of the struggle, but you are choosing to power it with Christ's strength, not your own dwindling willpower. You are trading the temporary drip of dopamine for the deep, sustaining river of God's peace."

Let's Pray

Jesus, we admit that we often try to fill our emptiness with things that can't satisfy, and we carry more than we were meant to carry on our own. Some people here are still unsure about You, some are just beginning to trust You, and others have enjoyed your presence for many years, but we all feel the weight of life. Holy Spirit, help those who don't know you, to see You and know You.

And for those here who are ready to take the next step in their journey of faith, may they choose today to place the full weight of their hope on You.

Thank You for paying our debt, carrying our weakness, and giving us strength in every situation. Meet each person right where they are. Give us Your peace, Your strength, and the courage to take our next step toward You.

Amen.

Benediction

Paul says:

And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.

²⁰ Now all glory to God our Father forever and ever! Amen.